Gun-Toting Klansman Denies Bombing Black Birmingham Church in 1958

By Bill Richards
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MARIETTA, Ga., Sept. 28—The leader of the National States Rights Party, political arm of the Ku Klux Klan, was arrested here today on a charge that he dynamited a black church in Birmingham, Ala., in 1958.

J. B. Stoner, 53, denied in Cobb County Superior Court here that he was involved in the bombing. Wearing a small Confederate flag in his jacket breast pocket, Stoner—who once ran against Jimmy Carter for governor of Georgia—said the statute of limitations had run out on the 1958 Birmingham bombing anyway. He was released on $10,000 bail.

Earlier, Stoner met with reporters here outside his party headquarters, a trim two-story brick building with a Confederate flag out front and two German shepherd guard dogs inside the fenced yard. Stoner, who was wearing a pistol in a holster on his right hip, called his indictment Monday by a grand jury in Birmingham the work of "the nigger-loving" attorney general of Alabama, William J. Baxley.

The case is an outgrowth of a long-running investigation by Baxley into the racially motivated bombings that rocked Birmingham and other Southern cities in the 1950s and 1960s.

Robert Chambliss, 73, of Birmingham, a retired auto mechanic, was accused on Monday of the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, in which four young black girls were killed.

Informed sources in Alabama said today that the Birmingham Grand Jury will return indictments against several more persons in the next two to three weeks. Alabama authorities believe that most of the racial bombings during the early desegregation struggle in the South were the work of two or three small groups of men.

Spokesmen for the Alabama attorney general's office in Montgomery declined today to give any details of a visit they made earlier this week to Grand Prairie, Tex. The officials questioned Bobby Cherry, 47, a former Birmingham klansman who moved to Texas 10 years ago. Sources said Cherry was questioned about his knowledge of the 1963 church bombing in Birmingham and other bombings.

Stoner was charged today with putting a dynamite bomb alongside the Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham on June 29, 1958. The pastor of the church was Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth, fromer Birmingham civil rights leader.

The bomb exploded after it was moved into an open area between the church and an adjoining house by a Bethel church employee. No one was injured.

The indictment against Stoner centers on the damage done to the house. der Alabama law the statute of limitations for bombing an uninhabited building runs out after 10 years, but

J. B. STONER
... released on $10,000 bond

bombing an inhabited dwelling is a capital offense with no statute of limitations.

Stoner is a colorful figure among avowed Southern racists who often travels from state to state speaking at Klan rallies. He told reporters today that he thought he would be killed by the FBI if he were extradited to Alabama to stand trial on the bombing charge.